

Foreword

<http://www.wkap.nl/journalhome.htm/1092-7875>
XX0100825

Violence and Reproductive Health

Alison M. Spitz^{1,3} and James S. Marks²

This special edition of the *Maternal and Child Health Journal* grew out of a major conference, the National Conference on Violence and Reproductive Health: Science, Prevention, and Action, which was held in Atlanta, Georgia, June 16–19, 1999. The conference, convened by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), but with many cosponsors and funding organizations, focused on assessing the state of the science, increasing awareness and understanding of the association between violence against women and reproductive health, and laying the groundwork for future research and action. The commentaries and research papers in this issue reflect much of the thinking that came from that conference and the work that followed it. We are pleased to share this information with the maternal and child health community.

Violence and the threat of violence affect women's reproductive health in many ways. Women affected by violence may be unable to control or negotiate satisfactory or consistent contraceptive use, protect themselves against infection by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), or plan a pregnancy or remain free from assault during one. They may lack access to health care, including routine but essential services such as screening and prenatal care. One theme that echoes throughout the papers presented here is that prevention and intervention measures must take into account the perspectives of these women. Unfortu-

nately, it is equally clear that much more qualitative research is needed to understand their perspectives, for the research and health care community has only begun to hear their voices. Our inability to understand their plight is another denial of access; in terms of communication, we have been mutually inaccessible for too long.

The papers in this special issue of the *Maternal and Child Health Journal* aim to help bridge that gap. They are multidisciplinary and reflect a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds, with recommendations for future research and action based on both the expertise of the authors and the discussions held during the conference. Recommendations fall into three major areas: science, health care practice and systems, and policy. They address similar areas relevant to contraceptive use, pregnancy, HIV and STDs, and sexual assault. Science-related recommendations call for an increased understanding of the association between violence against women and reproductive health through the use of rigorous design and analytic methods to address issues of causality, temporal association, and risk and protective factors. Some very basic and important research questions remain unanswered: Does violence increase, decrease, or remain the same during pregnancy? How does violence influence reproductive decision making? Recommendations related to health care practice and systems call for the design and evaluation of interventions to reduce and prevent violence against women. As many of the papers in this issue point out, although calls have been made for broad screening of women at risk for violence, little is known about what screening and intervention strategies might be effective at decreasing violence against women and ultimately improving reproductive health. Recommendations regarding policy insist that research findings from epidemiologic and health care services form the basis for local and national policies and funding decisions. The development of innovative and effective interventions will depend on a wide variety of community,

¹Division of Reproductive Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Promotion and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia.

²National Center for Chronic Disease Promotion and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia.

³Correspondence and requests for a complimentary copy of this issue should be addressed to Alison Spitz, Division of Reproductive Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Promotion and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 4770 Buford Highway, Mailstop K-35, Atlanta, Georgia 30341; e-mail: ams2@cdc.gov.

advocacy, legal, and medical groups working together.

We have tried with this special issue of the *Maternal and Child Health Journal* to capture both the spirit and the substance of the conference by selecting the original research papers included here and also by following each paper with a commentary. These commentaries do not analyze the research paper, but address what we know, unanswered questions, and future directions in the area that the research paper advances.

In a relatively short time, the work presented at the conference has stimulated new efforts at developing effective interventions related to violence and reproductive health. First, in response to the lack of effective interventions, the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, is funding four Title V demonstration projects to improve systems of health care for women who risk or experience domestic violence. Second, a number of professional organizations and journals have published articles (in print and on-line) on the conference and issues related to its content (1-5). And third, The Agenda for the Nation on Violence Against Women, an effort cochaired by Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala and Attorney General Janet Reno, incorporates recommendations from the conference. It also calls for a CDC consortium of researchers, advocates, and providers to develop and implement a coordinated research agenda to develop interventions to reduce and prevent violence against women of reproductive age. Such efforts are steps that are needed to improve the health and safety of women and their children, but we must be mindful that the process is long overdue and will be complicated.

Lastly, this special issue of the *Maternal and Child Health Journal* and the conference that preceded it represent the efforts of many individuals, participating funding organizations, and cosponsors. We want to acknowledge the hard work of all who helped in these efforts. Below we list the cosponsors and funding agencies who helped bring together and support this issue. The contributions of all these persons and organizations ensured the success of the conference and the timely development of this special issue. Their work represents an important contribution to women's reproductive health by reducing and preventing violence against women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following organizations for their support and assistance in making this special issue of *Maternal and Child Health Journal* possible.

Funding Partners

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Ortho-McNeil Pharmaceutical
March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation
Solvay Pharmaceuticals, Inc.
American Psychological Association

Cosponsors

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP)
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC)
National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention (NCHSTP)
Office of Women's Health (OWH)
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP)
Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
Office of Population Affairs (OPA)
Public Health Service Office on Women's Health (PHSOWH)
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

REFERENCES

1. Goodwin MM, Petersen R, Kowal D, Koenig L, Saltzman LE, Spitz AM. Highlights of national conference on violence and reproductive health: Science, prevention, and action. *Am J Prev Med* 2000;18:186-7.
2. Moore M. Reproductive health and intimate partner violence. *Fam Plann Perspect* 1999;6:302-12.
3. Cole T. Case management for domestic violence. *JAMA* 1999;282:513.
4. Rabasca L. More research is needed on violence and reproduction. *APA Monit Online* 1999;30.
5. Molina G. Violence and reproductive health, 1999. Available on line at, www.plannedparenthood.org.